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DISTRICT 6 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Okanogan County

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FIRE AND ROAD CONDITIONS UPDATE

At the time of this writing, one major fire was burning in District 6. The Diamond Creek Fire in the central portion of the Pasayten Wilderness Area includes over 28,000 acres and hot, dry, windy conditions enabled it to continue growing. In late August, the fire was entirely within GMU 203, but it could eventually extend into GMU 218. The Billy Goat Trailhead area is closed, as are many trails in the central portion of the wilderness. This fire is likely to remain active until the region receives significant fall precipitation, and will likely impact high buck hunt access and opportunity. Potential impacts to general seasons are unknown at present. Check with the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest for current information on fire activity, access closures, and campfire restrictions. Significant and possibly complete campfire bans are likely, possibly well into the fall.

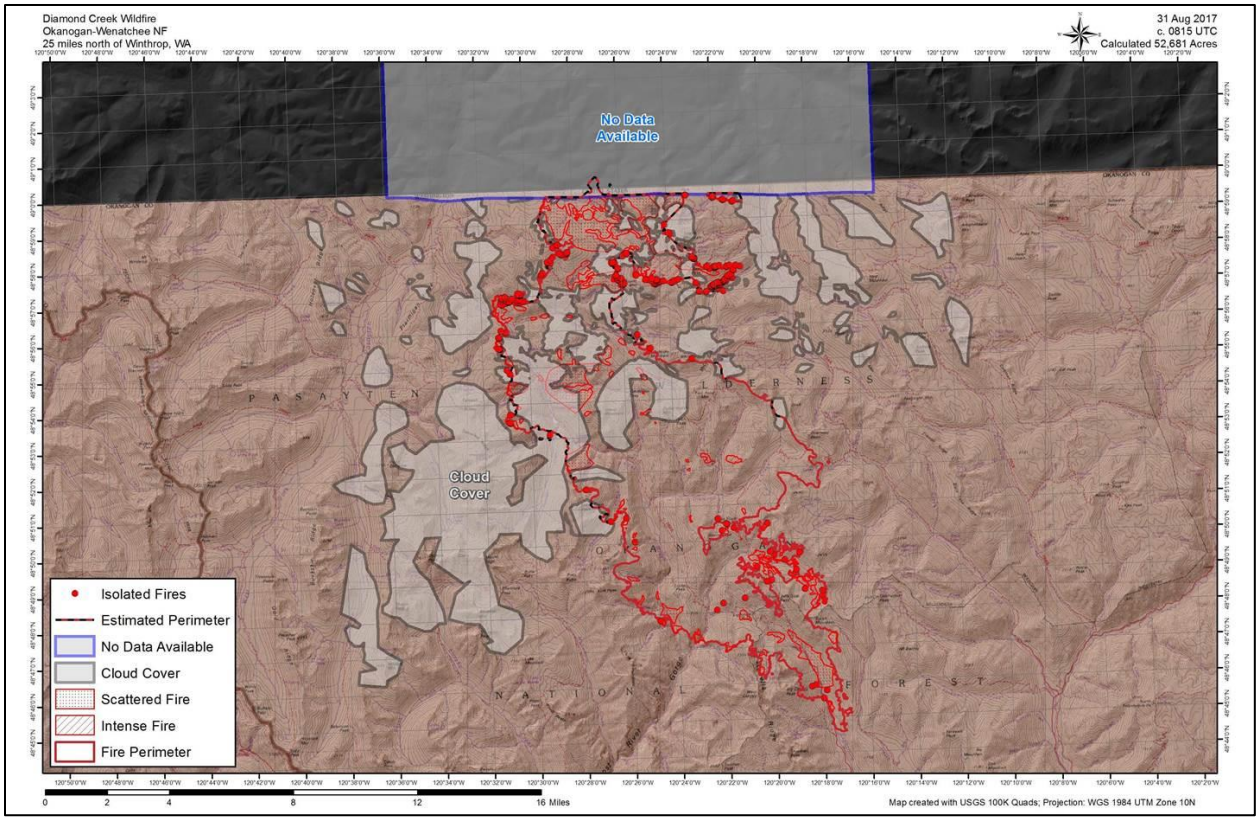
Heavy spring rain runoff following the extensive fire activity of recent years has significantly damaged many roads in the western portion of Okanogan County across all landownership jurisdictions, including State Route 20 over the Loup Loup summit. Highway 20 is currently passable and will hopefully be fully open by the deer general seasons. Many damaged road sections and some closures remain, particularly on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. Some of the hardest hit areas are the southern third of GMU 242 and the Upper Beaver Creek Watershed in GMU 224. Check with appropriate land management agencies for current conditions.

On the plus side, vegetation is generally recovering very nicely in recently burned areas and game animals have returned to these portions of the district. This year's seasonal growth was particularly robust at lower and middle elevations.

Fire Location: Diamond Creek Fire is burning within the Pasayten Wilderness and Eightmile drainage approximately 12 air miles north of Mazama, Washington and 5.5 miles (8.9 kilometers) south of the Canadian border.

Closures as of August 31. Eightmile Creek (5130) Road is closed one mile beyond Honeymoon Campground. The Ortell (5220) Road is closed from Cub Pass, at the intersection with the Sweetgrass Butte (5220-100) Road, to the Eightmile (5130) Road. Sweetgrass Butte (5220-100) Road is closed from Cub Pass, at the intersection with Ortell (5220) Road, to Sweetgrass Butte.Falls Creek Road 5140 is closed.

Trails closed include all wilderness trails between Robinson Creek and Andrews Creek; also Chewuch River #510 beyond the junction with Fire Creek, Topaz Mt. #360, Boundary Trail #533 between Teapot Dome and the junction with Middle Fork Pasayten Trail #478.



For more information, see:

- Okanogan National Forest, Methow Valley Ranger District
- DNR Regulated Fire Restrictions
- InciWeb Current Fire Status
- Okanogan County Emergency Management

DISTRICT 6 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 6 is located along the Canadian border in north-central Washington and encompasses ten game management units: 203 (Pasayten), 204 (Okanogan East), 209 (Wannacut), 215 (Sinlahekin), 218 (Chewuch), 224 (Perrygin), 231 (Gardner), 233 (Pogue), 239 (Chiliwist), and 242 (Alta).

The western two-thirds of the district, stretching from the Okanogan River to the Pacific Crest, lies on the east slope of the Cascade Range and is dominated by mountainous terrain that gets more rugged as you move from east to west. Vegetation in this portion of the district ranges from desert/shrubsteppe at the lowest elevations to various types of conifer forests, culminating in alpine tundra on the higher peaks, which top out at almost 9,000 feet. More than three-quarters of the land base in this portion of the county is in public ownership, offering extensive hunting access. Game is plentiful and dispersed throughout the area for most of the year, concentrating in the lower elevations in winter when deep snows cover much of the landscape.

GMU 204 includes the eastern one-third of the district (from the Okanogan River east to the Okanogan County line) and is moderately rolling terrain, generally rising in elevation as you move east. The vegetation changes from shrubsteppe near the Okanogan River to a mix of tall grass and conifer forest throughout the remainder of the unit. This portion of the district is roughly a 50-50 patchwork of public and private land, with the public lands generally being higher in elevation. Again, game is plentiful and dispersed throughout.

Weather in the Okanogan District can be quite variable and capable of changing quickly in the fall. Be prepared for everything from warm, sunny days to the possibility of winter temperatures and significant snow at higher elevations by the second week of October.

Please be respectful of private land and treat landowners and their property the way you would want to be treated if roles were reversed.

Chewuch River and Pasayten Wilderness – Photos by Scott Fitkin

Agency biologists will run a biological check and information station at the Red Barn in Winthrop both weekends of the modern firearm general deer season. We encourage hunters to stop and provide data to biologists whether they have harvested a deer or not. Data collected assists in assessing herd health and shaping population management.

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Overall, elk numbers are low in District 6. However, conditions vary noticeably between the east and west portions of Okanogan County. The western two-thirds of the district are not currently covered under a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) elk herd management plan, and the existing harvest strategy (any elk general season) is designed to minimize elk numbers to prevent agricultural damage and avoid competition with the large migratory mule deer herd. As such, elk are quite scarce west of the Okanogan River and very difficult to find without extensive local knowledge.

The eastern portion of the district (GMU 204) is covered by the Selkirk Elk Herd Plan. Its four primary goals are: (1) to preserve, protect, perpetuate, manage, and enhance elk and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations and ecosystem integrity, (2) to manage this elk herd for a sustained hunting yield, (3) to manage elk for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, biodiversity, wildlife viewing, and photography, and (4) to manage elk and elk habitat to minimize human conflicts and agricultural damage. More specifically, GMU 204 supports part of the Pend Oreille sub-herd population, where the current management objective is to gradually increase elk numbers while addressing the above four goals. As a result, this unit is now managed with an any-bull harvest during general seasons. Elk are not currently abundant enough to warrant a survey effort in District 6, but observations suggest numbers continue to increase in GMU 204 and improve harvest opportunity accordingly.

2016 District 6 Elk Harvest Statistics: District 6 General Season Elk Harvest

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

As noted above, GMU 204 is the only GMU in District 6 with a significant number of elk. Within this unit elk tend to be most numerous in the area from Havillah through the Chesaw Wildlife Area, the Waconda Summit / Mount Annie area, and USFS lands bordering the Colville Reservation. In the rest of the district, finding and animals is extremely difficult unless you have up-to-date knowledge on one of the few small bands of elk that wax and wane in this portion of the county.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Beginning in 2016, GMU 204 was added to the early archery general season, and muzzleloader opportunity in GMU 204 was removed from the late season and added to the early season. These changes are designed to shift hunting pressure to earlier in the fall when elk are more likely to be in areas where conflicts with agriculture could arise. This also makes the seasons consistent with neighboring GMU 101, where management objectives are similar.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

District 6 supports perhaps the largest migratory mule deer herd in the state and Okanogan County has long been prized by hunters for its mule deer hunting. The district also supports significant numbers of white-tailed deer, particularly in GMUs 204 and 215. The District 6 deer management objective is for a stable to modestly increasing population within the social tolerance limits for nuisance and damage issues.

Okanogan District mule deer and white-tailed deer – Photos by Scott Fitkin

However, GMUs 204, 233, and 239 are currently being managed in the short-term for stable to slightly decreasing populations in response to the landscape's reduced ability to support deer in the wake of the huge landscape level fires of 2014 and 2015. The fire burned huge tracts of critical winter shrub forage. Managing browsing pressure will be important to winter range recovery and the long-term health of the herd.

Despite the recent massive fires and moderately tough winters, district deer populations are doing fine, thanks in part to high quality summer range and greater than normal fall green-up in recent years.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

With the possible exception of GMU 209, all units in District 6 support significant numbers of deer, include large blocks of accessible public land, and offer good to excellent deer hunting opportunity. GMU 209 is the driest unit overall and has the highest percentage of private land, so general season opportunities are more modest in this area. Mule deer are abundant throughout the county, with the highest densities occurring in the Methow Valley and along the divide between the Methow and Okanogan watersheds.

Overall, white-tailed deer are less numerous than mule deer in Okanogan County, and in contrast to mule deer, white-tail abundance generally increases as you move east in the district. The largest population is in GMU 204, where white-tailed deer comprise about half of the overall deer population. Although white-tailed deer numbers are less abundant in the western portion of the district, they are still found in most all drainages up to mid-elevations, particularly those with significant riparian vegetation. The highest concentration in this area are in the Sinlahekin Valley and surrounding drainages. In many areas west of GMU 204 and outside of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, white-tailed deer frequent private lands. Prospective hunters wishing to target white-tailed deer may want to seek permission in advance of the season to access individual ownerships.

General season hunters harvested 2,717 (2,470 bucks, 247 antlerless) deer in District 6 during 2016. Although a decrease from the banner harvest in 2015, this total is still right at the 5-year average and about 14 percent above the 10-year average. The overall general season success rates were about average and broke out as follows: Modern – 20 percent, Muzzleloader – 28 percent, Archery – 26 percent, and Multi-season – 30 percent.

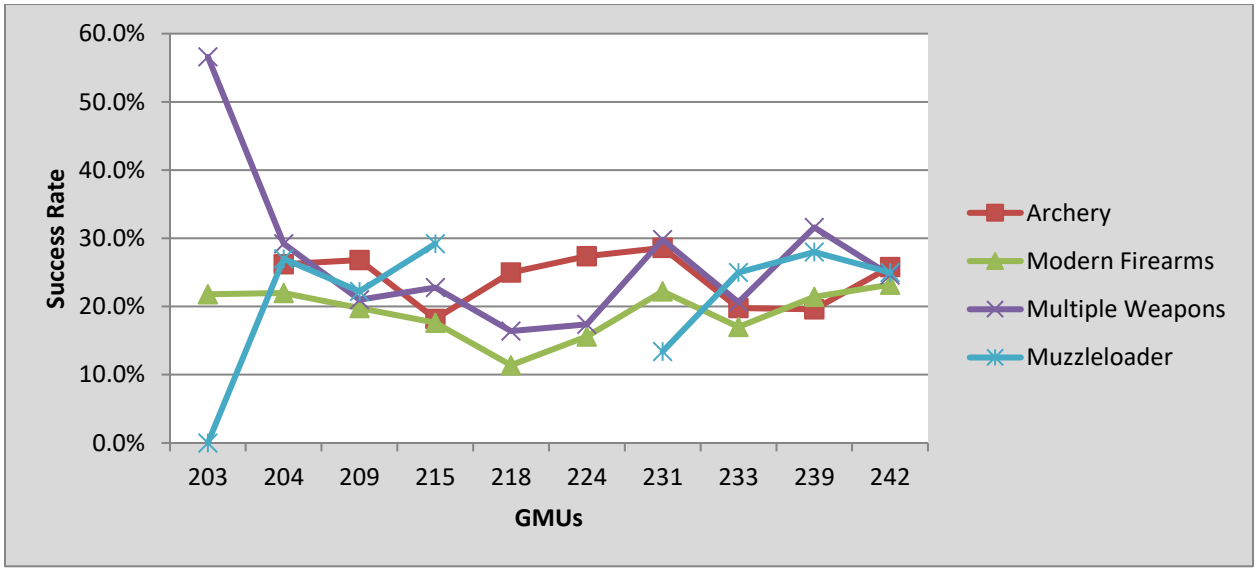


Figure 1. District 6 2016 general season hunter success by weapon type and GMU.

GMU 204 (the district's largest unit) yielded the greatest overall general season deer harvest of 739 animals. In the western portion of the district, GMUs 215, 218, 224 combined to produce a harvest of 870 animals, accounting for 31 percent of the total number of deer taken in District 6.

For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Deer Harvest Statistics: District 6 General Season Deer Harvest

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

Heavier than average fawn mortality (67 percent versus the long term average of 53 percent) during the 2015-16 winter could potentially mean a dip in 2.5-year-old buck availability. However, this was offset by an uptick in post-season buck escapement as evidenced by an observed sex ratio of 20 bucks per 100 does as compared to 16 per 100 the previous year. Total harvest and success rates are anticipated to be near the 2016 numbers and around the 10-year average.

So far, only one moderate sized fire is affecting District 6 this summer, but extended hot and dry conditions are drying the landscape and creating the potential for large scale fires. If this weather pattern continues, expect the high country to be drier than usual. If so, deer might move toward winter range early (tail end of the general season), similar to what hunters saw in 2015. Otherwise, expect deer to be widely dispersed during the general seasons. Regardless, expect significant campfire restrictions and check with local agencies for updates.

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT MULE DEER

During the early general seasons, deer will generally be widely distributed on the landscape and not yet concentrated in migration areas or on winter range. The one possible exception could be the tail end of the general modern firearm season, as mentioned above. Mature bucks in particular are often at high elevations in remote locations as long as succulent vegetation is available. In general, older, higher elevation burns, including the Tripod, Thirty-mile, Farewell, and Needles Fires, are producing high quality summer forage and are a good bet for significant deer activity. Although mule deer will use a variety of habitat types, they will often forage well into fairly open environments, particularly at dawn and dusk. As a result, they can often be glassed and stalked from considerable distance.

During the high hunt, deer will definitely still be spread across the landscape and are found in good numbers throughout the Pasayten Wilderness. Easier access to higher, more open country for hunters on foot is located at the Harts Pass and Iron Gate trailheads at the western and eastern ends of the wilderness respectively. For those with horses, the Billy Goat, Andrews Creek, and Thirty-Mile trailheads offer access to good deer terrain further in.

For Youth, Senior, and Disabled Hunters holding antlerless tags, does are spread across the landscape even more so than bucks during the general season, so permit holders should be able to find antlerless animals anywhere they have legal access.

During the late permit seasons, the majority of deer will have moved to winter range areas at lower elevations on more southerly slopes to participate in the breeding season. In District 6, WDFW wildlife areas and immediately adjacent federal lands are good bets for high deer numbers in late fall, although in low snow years, some mature bucks may linger at higher elevations. In exceptionally mild years, hunters may have to go a bit higher than usual to find deer concentrations. Some GMU specific recommendations for late mule deer permit holders are as follows:

GMU 215: Look for deer on the south facing slopes in the Toats Coulee drainage, open portions of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area (SWA), and south facing slopes of the major drainages to the west of the Sinlahekin, including Cecil, Sarsapkin, and Sinalhekin Creeks and their tributaries.

GMU 218: The Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area (MWA), and the Cub Creek, Buck Lake, and Lower Boulder Creek area of the Okanogan National Forest (ONF) are good bets.

GMU 224: Favorite spots are portions of the MWA and adjacent ONF lands in the southern portion of the unit. This includes more open habitat in drainages such as Pearrygin, Ramsay, Bear, Blue Buck, Beaver, and Frazier Creeks.

GMU 231: Check out the Big Buck portion of the MWA, as well as the Virginia Ridge, Thompson Ridge, and Little Bridge Creek areas of the ONF

GMU 233: The main unit and Pogue Mountain Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area (SCWA), the Carter Mountain Unit of the SWA, and public land in the Salmon Creek Drainage are good places to start.

GMU 239: The Texas Creek Unit of the MWA and the Chiliwist Unit of the SWA along with adjacent DNR land offer good opportunities. Upper portions of Finley, Benson, and Texas Creeks on the ONF are also worth a look.

GMU 242: Look for deer on the Golden Doe Unit of the MWA and on south facing slopes on public land in the Libby Creek and Gold Creek drainages.

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT WHITE-TAILED DEER

White-tailed deer are typically far less migratory than mule deer and generally favor brushier country with denser cover, primarily at lower and middle elevations. Look for white-tails along stream drainages and in other areas with riparian vegetation or thick cover. Like mule deer, white-tails are most active at dawn and dusk, but often don't venture as far into larger openings unless under the cover of darkness. Look for white-tails in edge habitats where denser cover abruptly transitions into more open meadows. Many white-tail hunters will wait patiently at a stationary position along an obvious game trail or the forest edge, often employing the use of a blind or tree stand.

During the late permit season, some white-tails summering at modestly high elevations will move a little ways downslope, but most will be in the same areas they inhabited during summer. GMU specific recommendations for late permit holders and late archery season in the western portion of the district are as follows:

GMU 215: White-tails are abundant on the SWA and Chopaka Unit of the SCWA.

GMU 218: Look for deer in the Eight-mile drainage, along the Chewuch River, and in the lower half of the Rendezvous Unit of the MWA (despite the open habitat).

GMU 224: Brushier areas along Bear Creek, Upper Beaver Creek and its tributaries, and basin drained by the West Fork Salmon Creek west of Conconully are good bets.

GMU 231: Good possibilities include the huntable portion of the Big Valley Unit of the MWA, and the portion of the unit in the Twisp River Valley (north of the Twisp River Road). White-tails can sometimes be encountered on the south slopes of the Big Buck Unit of the MWA as they move uphill off private land.

GMU 233: Despite the open terrain, the Happy Hill area of the SCWA is productive, along with the Buzzard Lake Unit of the SWA and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 239: White-tails can be found on ONF land in the South Summit area between Loup Loup Pass and Leecher Mountain and in wetter areas in the western portion of the Chiliwist Unit of the SWA and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 242: Productive areas include the brushy areas along the river and in the northern half of the Golden Doe Unit of the MWA, as well as the valley bottom of the Twisp River drainage. Public land along Libby and Gold Creeks is also a possibility.

Antlerless white-tail permit holders should look for animals in the same areas mentioned above with the added expectation of a few more deer in the higher reaches of areas like the Twisp River and Eight-mile drainages than might be expected during the late season.

DEER AREAS

For those hunters with second deer permits in Deer Areas 2012 -2016, remember that those permits are good **only on private land**. Permit holders are responsible for making contact with private land owners to secure hunting access.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Baiting for deer and elk is now more tightly regulated in accordance with WAC 232-12-245. See page 84 of the 2017 Big Game regulations for details. The late general archery season for white-tails in GMUs 204 and 209 has returned to the traditional Nov 22 – Dec 15 dates, as deer seem to be weathering the recent fire impacts okay.

BLACK BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears are abundant and well distributed throughout District 6 and are managed for sustainable harvest and diverse age structure. Monitored demographic parameters suggest the local population and associated harvest appear to be relatively stable, so hunting prospects in the district should be good.

For hunters pursuing black bear in the northern Cascades, it is critical to positively identify the bear species, as endangered grizzly bears potentially also inhabit these areas. WDFW's website

features some interactive training materials on how to tell the difference between black and grizzly bears. Click here to view the Interactive Bear Identification Program and take the Bear Identification Test.

WHICH GMU SHOULD BEAR HUNTERS HUNT?

All GMUs in the Okanogan District provide good black bear hunting opportunity. In 2016, hunters harvested 139 black bears from the western portion of the district in the Okanogan Bear Management Unit (BMU 5). This was up about 35 percent over the 2015 tally. Last year, hunter success was highest in units with good road access like GMUs 215 and 233. GMU 204 in the Northeastern BMU yielded 69 animals, up from 48 the year before, which is not surprising given the disruptions caused by the Tunk Block Fires in 2015.

For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Black Bear Harvest Statistics:

- Okanogan BMU Black Bear Harvest
- Northeastern BMU Black Bear Harvest

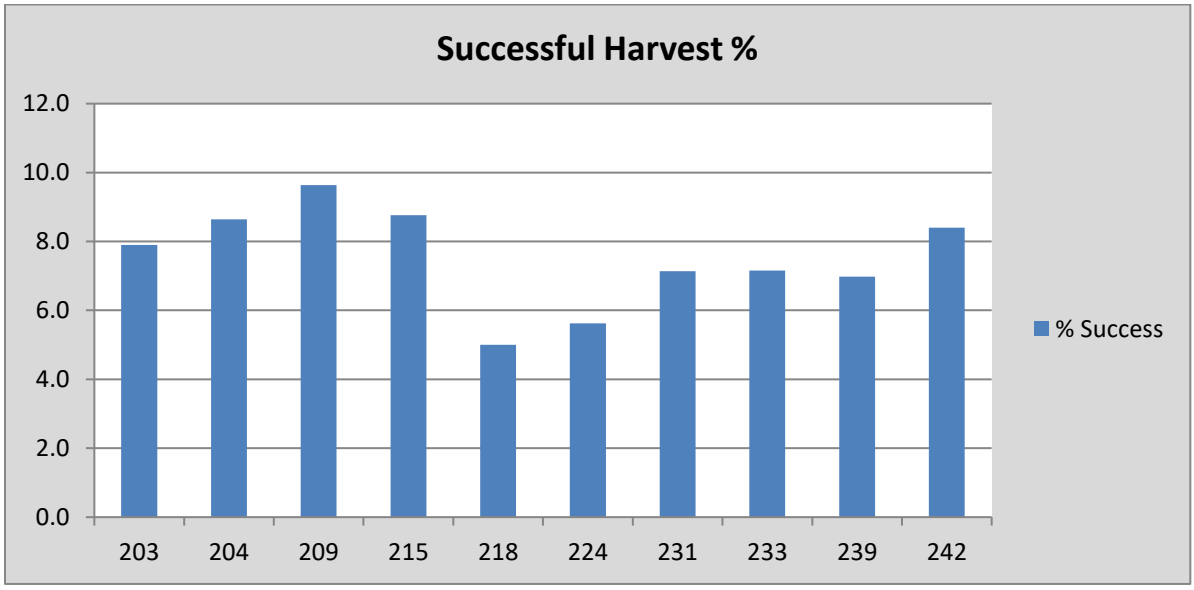


Figure 2. Okanogan District 5-year average black bear harvest success rates by GMU.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

In general, at the beginning of bear season, animals are likely to be found at middle elevations in wetter areas where berries are peaking. As the season progresses, expect bears to follow the ripening berries to higher elevations. As we move into fall, animals will range over a wider gradient to take advantage of a variety of late season food sources. This year after a late onset for service berries, the hot weather is accelerating the development of the later crops and timing should be about average as bear season arrives.

Okanogan District black bear – Photo by Scott Fitkin

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

The District 6 cougar population is healthy and dispersed throughout the landscape. In the Okanogan District, cougars are now managed by a harvest guideline at the individual GMU level to better promote stable population structure and high quality sustainable harvest, while also minimizing human-cougar conflicts.

Cougar – Photo by Scott Fitkin

Cougars follow the deer herds, which means they will be spread throughout the district through late October and concentrate more at lower elevations as deer move to winter range. Much cougar foraging activity takes place at night, so the best opportunities to spot the cats on the move are at dawn and dusk.

WHICH GMU SHOULD COUGAR HUNTERS HUNT?

All Okanogan District GMUs support cougars and are open to hunting. After January 1, individual PMUs (one or more GMUs) close on short notice once the harvest guideline has been reached, and hunters are responsible for knowing if a unit is open or closed. This information is available on the WDFW hotline (1-866-364-4868) or online.

As is typical, last season's harvest fell short of the guidelines in several GMUs, and control-related mortality remained modest. As a result, cougar numbers should be robust and hunting opportunities in District 6 should be good in 2017-18. A summary table of the harvest guideline by PMU is presented below.

For more information, see the 2016-2017 District 6 Cougar Harvest Statistics: State-wide cougar harvest by PMU.

PMU Hunt Area (GMUs)	Harvest Guideline	2012-2013 Harvest	2013-2014 Harvest	2014-2015 Harvest	2015-2016 Harvest	2016-2017 Harvest
203	4-6	0	0	0	0	0
204	6-8	5	5	1	7	2
209, 215	3-5	3	2	4	5	3
218, 231	4-6	2	3	2	2	3
224	2-3	1	2	1	1	3
233,239	3-4	2	0	1	3	5
242,243	6-7	4	4	3	4	3

Table 1. District 6 cougar harvest guidelines and 5-year harvest by GMU.

WATERFOWL

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Okanogan District offers modest waterfowl hunting opportunities as compared to many other areas of the state. The largest concentrations of birds occur at the southern edge of District 6, at the mouth of the Okanogan River and on the Columbia River. The main stem of the Okanogan and Upper Similkameen rivers and the larger lakes and potholes in the Okanogan Watershed are good secondary sites. Good public river access can be found at the Washburn Island Unit of the Wells Wildlife Area, the Driscoll-Eyhott Island Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.

Barrows golden eye pair – Photo by Scott Fitkin

Canada geese in a Methow Valley grain field – Photo by Scott Fitkin

Water levels in local potholes remained high again in 2017, but are coming down a bit with the prolonged hot and dry weather. River levels are currently running around average or a little below normal and are likely to be similar going into the hunting season. Aside from water levels, waterfowl hunting opportunities are mostly dependent on the number of migrants coming from Canada and Alaska and how long water remains ice-free throughout the district.

For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Waterfowl Harvest Statistics: Okanogan County Small Game Harvest

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

The Okanogan supports strong populations of ruffed, dusky (blue), and spruce grouse, which are found throughout the forested areas of the district. Ruffed grouse are generally associated with deciduous tree cover at lower to middle elevations, particularly in riparian habitats. During hunting season, dusky (blue) grouse are generally found in the mid to upper elevation conifer forests, often moving to ridges as snow begins to accumulate. Spruce grouse are located in higher elevation conifer forests throughout the district on a year-round basis.

Forest grouse populations are likely below historical norms within the boundaries of recent wildfires, including the massive Carlton Complex, Okanogan Complex, Tunk Block, and Tripod fires. These fires burned in some of the best and most densely occupied forest grouse habitat in the district. However, grouse habitat within the burns is improving annually (particularly in the Tripod Fire area), and bird numbers outside of burned areas appear to be relatively stable.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

The sprawling landscape of Okanogan yielded a mixed harvest of 7,388 dusky, ruffed, and spruce grouse, down 11 percent over last year. Similarly, grouse harvest per unit effort declined by 27 percent in 2016. This was likely due to poor early brood survival due to a cool wet spring. Spring conditions were similar and anecdotal observations suggest harvest may be similar to 2016, a little below the 5-year average. Like last year, the number of displaying dusky grouse in the spring appeared to be down somewhat, but spruce grouse production appears to have been strong throughout their range in Okanogan County.

For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Forest Grouse Harvest Statistics: Okanogan County Small Game Harvest .

Male dusky grouse and female spruce grouse – Photos by Scott Fitkin

PHEASANTS

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Pheasants occur at low densities and in a patchy distribution throughout the Okanogan Watershed portion of District 6, with the majority of harvested birds coming from pheasant release sites. This year, pheasants will again be released at the Bureau of Reclamation's Hegdal and Kline sites, and at the Chilliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Creek Wildlife Area. What little wild production exists within the county comes mostly from private land. Hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private property.

The release sites are mapped on the GoHunt website, as well as in the Eastern Washington Pheasant Release booklet found here: Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Program. Hunters are reminded that nontoxic shot is required for ALL upland bird hunting on ALL pheasant release sites statewide.

Hunters bagged 806 pheasants last year in Okanogan County. Both the total harvest and harvest per unit effort were right at the 5-year average.

For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Pheasant Harvest Statistics: Okanogan County Small Game Harvest

Pheasant release – Photo by WDFW

QUAIL

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Quail are locally abundant and widespread throughout the district's lower elevation shrubsteppe and open pine forest habitats. District 6 wildlife areas offer good access to quail habitat. Anecdotal observations this spring and summer suggest quail production has been good again this year, with some birds having multiple clutches, suggesting 2017 harvest will likely be similar to last year. In 2016, hunters took 7,808 quail in Okanogan County, down about 10 percent from last year, but both harvest and harvest per unit effort remained at the 5-year average.

For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Quail Harvest Statistics: Okanogan County Small Game Harvest

TURKEYS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Turkeys are found in scattered groups throughout the district and often concentrate on private land near agriculture areas. Prospective hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private land. The fall turkey permit season occurs within GMUs 218-231 and 242, with the majority of the birds being located in the latter two units. In recent years, winter conditions and declines in supplemental feeding by private individuals have reduced turkey numbers substantially in the Methow Valley, although most lower-elevation drainages in GMU 242 still harbor birds.

CHUKAR AND GRAY PARTRIDGE

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

In general, gray partridge populations are widely distributed and patchy throughout the district's shrubsteppe habitats, but appear to be increasing in numbers and distribution over time. Birds are seen frequently on the Indian Dan, Chiliwist, and Methow wildlife areas. Scattered groups of chukars are found in the rocky areas in lower elevations of District 6. The steep hills along the Similkameen River in the north part of the Okanogan Valley hold good numbers of birds.

Combined harvest of chukar and gray partridge in 2016, as well as catch per unit effort, fell significantly following a moderately tough winter. This past winter was also somewhat tougher that the recent averages, but forage production cover growth was good, so it is likely to suspect a harvest level in 2017 somewhere between the 2015 and 2016 tallies. For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Partridge Harvest Statistics: Okanogan County Small Game Harvest.

DOVE

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Dove harvest fell significantly in 2016, but this appears to be the result of reduced hunter days rather than availability. Vegetation has responded vigorously both within and outside of the burn areas of recent years, making the outlook good for doves in 2016. Look for doves in planted food crops in the Sinlahekin and at lower elevations on other public land. Hunting success will depend on warm weather keeping the birds in the area through the season.

For more information, see the 2016 District 6 Mourning Dove Harvest Statistics: Okanogan County Small Game Harvest.